

# MELANOMA



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A skin cancer that spreads to other areas of the body, primarily the lymph nodes, liver, lungs and central nervous system. Most melanomas begin in a mole or other pre-existing skin lesion.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

A flat or slightly raised skin lesion that can be black, brown, blue, red, white or a mixture of all colors. Its borders are often irregular and may bleed.

### CAUSES

Uncontrolled growth of cells that give skin its brownish color (melanocytes). When the cells grow down into deep skin layers, they invade blood vessels and lymph vessels and are spread to other body areas.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Moles on the skin.
- Occupations or activities involving excessive sun exposure, such as farming, construction work, athletics or sunbathing.
- Pregnancy.
- Genetic factors. This is most common in light-complexioned, blond people. It is rare in black people.
- Radiation treatment or excessive exposure to ultraviolet light, as with sun lamps.
- Family history of melanoma.
- Living in "sunbelt" areas of the U.S.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Protect yourself from excessive sun exposure. Wear broad-rimmed hats and protective clothing. Use maximum protection sun-block preparations on exposed skin. This is especially important in the adolescent years.
- Examine your skin, including soles of the feet, regularly for changes in pigmented areas. Ask a family member to examine your back. Get medical advice about any skin area (especially brown or black) that becomes multicolored, develops irregular edges or surfaces and bleeds or changes in any way.
- Community-provided, skin cancer screening clinics available in some areas.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Varies greatly. Early melanomas that have not spread are curable with surgical removal. Once the tumor has spread to distant organs, this condition is currently considered incurable and fatal in a short time. However, symptoms can be relieved or controlled.
- Scientific research into causes and treatment continues, so there is hope for increasingly effective treatment and cure.

## POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Fatal spread to lungs, liver, brain or other internal organs.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Biopsy (removal of a small amount of tissue or fluid for laboratory examination that aids in diagnosis) of suspicious lesions. The melanoma's depth must be established to determine appropriate treatment.
- Surgery to remove suspicious skin lesions or to remove nearby lymph glands, if the tumor has spread. Skin graft may be necessary to avoid an unsightly scar.
- Once diagnosis is made, get frequent body examinations to check for other lesions.
- Radiation treatment, if the tumor has spread.
- Additional information available from the American Cancer Society, local branch listed in the telephone directory, or call (800) ACS-2345. Another source is the Cancer Information Clearinghouse at (800) 4-CANCER.

### MEDICATIONS

Anticancer (chemotherapy) drugs may be prescribed.

### ACTIVITY

No restrictions except those involving sun exposure (see Preventive Measures).

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of malignant melanoma.
- During treatment, changes occur in another skin area.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.